position database disposed in an in-shop terminal
of the tele-inventory system of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 7 is a diagram showing a function for
assisting in operation performed in the
tele-inventory system of FIG. 1.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A preferred embodiment of a present invention
will now be described with reference to the
accompanying drawings.

(A)   First Embodiment:

(A-1)   Fundamental points of a tele-inventory
system:

The fundamental points of a tele-inventory
system according to a first embodiment of the present
invention will now be described with reference to
FIG. 1, which schematically shows the fundamental
points of the tele-inventory system. As shown in
FIG. 1, the tele-inventory system 100 comprises an
in-shop terminal 10, a camera section 20, a
manipulator section 30, and a remote management
apparatus 50. The in-shop terminal 10, the camera
section 20, and the manipulator section 30 are
installed at a shop having one or more selling areas
in which various kinds of commodities to be
inventoried are sold and stocked. The remote

management apparatus 50 is communicably connected to the in-shop terminal 10 and is installed remotely from the shop (at a remote area), and makes an inventory of the commodities in the shop.

The camera section 20 takes images of object commodities that are to be inventoried and that are in the shop, and the manipulator section 30 manipulates posture and position of individual object commodities.

The shop terminal 10 is a personal computer or the like, as described later, which serves to function as an image transmitter 11, an instruction receiver 12, a camera control section 13, a database 14, a manipulator controlling section 15 and an in-shop display 16.

The image transmitter 11 transmits images of the object commodities, which images have been taken by the camera section 20, to the remote management apparatus 50 and the instruction receiver 12 receives instructions from the remote management apparatus 50. These instructions are issued by an operator (hereinafter also called an inventory employee or an inventory operator) that operates the remote management apparatus 50, as described later.

The camera control section 13 controls the camera section 20 based on instructions received

by the instruction receiver 12, and similarly, the manipulator controlling section 15 controls the manipulator section 30 based on instructions received by the instruction receiver 12.

The database 14 stores commodity information about a correlation between a name of an individual object commodity and position information about a position of the individual object commodity, previously. In the illustrated embodiment, if instructions to the camera control section 13, which instructions are received by the instruction receiver 12, designate a name of an object commodity, the camera control section 13 reads position information corresponding to the designated object commodity from the database 14, whereupon it controls the camera section 20 in such a manner that the camera section 20 takes an image of the designated object commodity based on the read position information.

The in-shop display 16 displays a later-described marked image, which the camera section 20 receives from the remote management apparatus 50.

The remote management apparatus 50 is also a personal computer as described later, and serves to function as an image receiver 51, an instruction transmitter 52, a management display 53, a pointing